

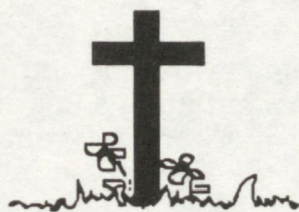
# Hammer Cemetery

## A Teacher's Guide



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# Hamer Cemetery

## A Teacher's Guide

Many pioneer superstitions and ghost stories had their beginnings at old-time burials, wakes and graveyards. Maybe their fascination was fueled by the way some of the supposedly dead people suddenly woke up, or in the way the bodies were hauled to the church for the dramatic ceremonies held there. This guide hopes to intertwine your students' natural fascination with facts about mid-nineteenth century (Victorian) burial customs by exploring Hamer Cemetery.

### Before the funeral

The body was washed and dressed soon after death while the village bell tolled the age of deceased. Prior to the funeral the body was stored in a cool place, for example the porch of the house. Sometimes it was necessary to massage the cheeks to get the eyes to close. Then in order to hold the eyes closed, they would put silver coins on eyes. Copper coins were not used because they would turn the skin green.

Someone would spend the first night with family. The wake was the following night, people usually stayed until midnight. The wake included food and hymns. There was no work done until after the burial. Women were usually buried wearing black or white (inexpensive material) or in an outfit she had pre-made for her funeral. It was not uncommon to have made your funeral clothes years in advance. Men were buried in suits and children in white. Most details concerning the funeral were free of charge.

The exterior of the coffin was made of poplar, pine, oak or chestnut, which was sometimes painted black. The inside was done in white cloth. Usually there were no flowers, although a woman might be buried with a flower in her hand.

The funeral service lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour, then the deceased was taken to the grave site.

A law was passed stating no one could view a body that had not been embalmed.



## After the funeral

The digging and filling of the grave was done by friends and neighbors, and was considered a sacred act. The grave stone was put up in a few days, and it was usually made at no charge to the family. The marker was generally made of limestone, occasionally one would be made of wood. Everything in the deceased's home was cleaned with the harshest soap and boiling water due to the prevalence of disease.

The female relatives wore black for a month or two, while the men wore black arm bands. The mother of the deceased wore a long black veil initially, then a short veil for the next four or five months. Occasionally cedar boughs were made into wreaths.

## The Grave Stone

Early stone carving represents the earliest American artform and written history in the United States today. Much can be learned about our American forebears from studying grave stones. Head and foot stones were used not only to mark the grave site, but also to leave a reminder of the person who died. The head stone could stand alone as the grave marker or a foot stone could be included.

### Grave markers can show:

- \* through the material used - trade routes, affluence
- \* information about carver and local art
- \* epidemics
- \* art and philosophy of the time
- \* attitudes toward death and immortality.

Early Americans (17th century) used skull/crossbones, scythes and hour-glasses. Later when conditions were less harsh, these symbols were replaced by cherubs or soul effigies.

### Epitaphs:

Colonial epitaphs (18th century) stressed the mortality of man (body in decay, life's brevity, and man's corruption.)..... "Death awaits us all"

My youthful mates both small and great  
Come here and you may see  
An awful sight, which is a type  
of which you soon must be.

Molly 'tho pleasant in her day  
Was suddenly seized and sent away  
How soon she's ripe, how soon she's rotten  
Laid in the grave and soon forgotten.

Victorian epitaphs (19th century) stressed the resurrection, heavenly reward, and a soul life after death.

Weep not for me my parents dear  
I'm gone to rest you need not fear.  
My stay was short as you must see  
therefore prepare to follow me.

Sleep on dear soul  
and take thy rest.  
God called thee home  
He thought it best.



## The epitaphs found on grave stones can include the following:

- \* They can reveal important genealogical information, sometimes otherwise lost or destroyed. Or.... maybe not....

Reader pass on! Don't waste your time  
on bad biography and bitter rhyme.  
For what I am this crumbling clay insures  
And what I was is no affair of yours.

- \* Record of personal statistics, such as gender, age, how died, or general population information.
- \* Indicated attitudes toward women, in the size of stone, intricacy of carving, and in the use of feminine attributes.
- \* Illuminate the local philosophy toward death. The use of HERE LIES... vs. HERE LIES THE BODY OF... indicates that the people differentiated the body from the soul. We do not know where they thought the soul would go, but it was now separate from the body and was going to a higher place.
- \* Recorded events of personal importance and historical importance.
- \* Represented a social equalizer of the rich and poor, the records of all can be found.
- \* Record of humor

Under the sod, and under the trees  
Here lies the body of Solomon Pease  
The Pease are not here there's only the pod  
The Pease shelled out and went to God

Beneath this little mound of clay  
Lies Captain Ephraim Daniels  
Who chose the dangerous month of May  
To change his winter flannels.

## Evolution of Symbols

In Colonial times the death mask, cherub and willow/urn designs were the only symbols used. Death masks indicated the mortality of man. Life was extremely difficult for the families coming to this country, they spent their entire day just trying to survive. As things got better and life was not such a struggle, they would use the Cherub or angel on their grave markers: the Cherubs stressed the resurrection. By the end of the 18th century the willow and urn design was popular. Several generations of a family had prospered, and survival was no longer in question. With their days no longer consumed with day-by-day existence, they now had the opportunity to think, and to use their imagination.

The Colonial willow now had to compete with a large variety of designs. The 1800's were a time of social and economic differentiation in American, there was little regimentation. The increase in the number of grave stone symbols illustrates that competitiveness and creativity were considered prime virtues.



Border motifs such as ears of corn symbolized harvest, or fruitfulness, and suggested that the deceased had been fruitful in their labors, and they themselves have been harvested, called home by their maker. A pineapple may reveal both the importance of hospitality in that day and also the welcoming of the soul to its heavenly home. Similar symbols were used in Europe indicating important ties to ones homeland.

The following is a list of some of the symbols and common meanings found in the Hamer Cemetery. Symbols were used to tell others about the deceased, have your students look for other symbols and tell what they think they might mean. (Note: not all the symbols use these particular meanings in Hamer Cemetery.)

#### SYMBOLS:

Compass

Three links of a chain

Lamb

Finger pointing upward

Weeping Willow tree

Shield, Star or Flag

Broken stem with open rose

Broken stem with rosebud

Angels

Dove of Peace

Clasped Hands

Gates of Heaven

Ivy

#### MEANINGS:

Masonic Lodge member

Odd Fellows Lodge member

Symbolized innocence

If deceased was an adult, the hand was of the opposite gender.

Eternal life. Great sorrow and grief.

A soldier

A young woman in the prime of life, a mother

A female who was not a mother

Represent a belief in material existence after death, frequently used with small children.

Came into use during the Civil War

Continuing devotion. The hands would be that of the opposite gender of the deceased.

Represent the Virgin Mary

Symbolizes memory, fidelity, and immortality



Three Leaves and a hanging bud

The three leaves represent the Trinity, and the hanging bud is the unrealized potential.

Lily

Two meanings. 1. purity, virginity innocence. 2. majestic, beauty and marriage.

Rose

Two meanings. 1. Lord, messianic hope and the nativity (rose with a cross, death of the Lord). 2. love, beauty, and perfection.

Bible, Gates of Heaven and Finger pointing upward are symbols usually used by Protestants.

Crucifix, Cross, Angels and Cherubims are symbols usually used by Catholics or Anglicans.

## Early American vs. Modern Cemeteries

Colonial or Victorian gravestones usually represented only a single individual. Since the 1950's more than half of the gravestones represent more than one person and arrangement is not random. Early American husband and wives were not greatly concerned about being buried side by side, but they were concerned with family solidarity, religious fervor and wealth, this was generally true through the 1920's.

In the 1920's there was a shift from ornate limestone to even black granite blocks being used as grave markers. This cemetery change parallels a societal change which encouraged a lessening of individuality. More recently bronze plaques have been replacing the massive blocks, illustrating a total denial of individuality in modern cemeteries.

**Stark massive blocks (1920 to present) indicates:**

- \* Assembly line industry over handcrafting.
- \* Social Darwinism changing to egalitarianism (the wealthy do not bring undue attention to self, i.e. tallest, largest stone).
- \* No epitaphs. No mention of God, Heaven, or any personal details.



## The Hamer Cemetery

The Hamer Cemetery was established in 1832. Your students can find a few stones that will predate this; these individuals were moved here by the family in hopes of preserving family unity. The following story relates how the cemetery began as remembered by Henry Hamer, Hugh Hamer's oldest son.

*A man and wife, traveling through the country in a two-horse wagon and camped overnight by the side of the road, near where the cemetery now is. In the night the man was taken seriously ill and died. Father (Hugh Hamer) heard of it the next morning, and went to learn the details. He returned to the mill and put his carpenters to building a black walnut coffin. He always kept on hand a good supply of that lumber for that purpose. Then with the help of some of his employees he buried the man in the forest a little distance from the road.*

*Not long after this another man in the neighborhood died of small pox. Again father sent me and one of the other boys, with a two horse wagon which carried a coffin. The coffin was left outside the house and the corpse was placed in it by the family. Later we returned and buried the small pox victim beside the traveler. Father deeded to the neighbors one acre of land for a cemetery. Later father himself died of small-pox and was buried in this beautiful little cemetery.*

Several unmarked graves have been found in the cemetery. Other sites are marked as a family plot without detailing necessarily which or how many family members are actually buried there. Some stones do not mark grave sites. Some of these may be noticed by the stone saying "IN MEMORY OF..." The two Brim children's graves do not have this designation on their stone, yet they are not buried in this cemetery. Several Civil War stones commemorating war veterans or those killed in action are missing from the cemetery.

The location of Hamer Cemetery is typical of pioneer cemeteries. The highest ground in the area was chosen for the cemetery, not only to prevent flooding, but also to place the inhabitants closer to God and Heaven. The graves themselves also are specially oriented. The sites have the graves facing East so that when Judgement Day comes the souls will rise to meet God face-to-face.

## PLEASE

Hamer Cemetery is still an active cemetery, and it is reserved for the descendants and family members of original villagers.

**RUBBINGS SHOULD NOT BE ATTEMPTED**, the stones can easily be damaged by the excess weight of a leaning person, and the wax of the crayons **DOES NOT** come off the limestone.

Thank you for helping us to maintain the dignity and serenity of the cemetery.



# HAMER CEMETERY WORKSHEET

1. Whose stone in Hamer Cemetery is the tallest? Why?
2. Hamer Cemetery originated in 1832. Can you find any stones that are older than that here? What is the most recent date you can find?
3. List 4 different symbols you found and what you think they mean.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
4. What is the difference between a head stone and a foot stone? Why don't all the graves have a foot stone?
5. Two different types of rock have been used to make the grave markers, granite and limestone. Which one is more recent and why has a change been made?
6. What common family names can you find in the cemetery?
7. What does "In memory of..." mean?
8. What direction do the stones face?
9. Which stone faces the wrong direction in Hamer Cemetery? Why?
10. One woman has both a limestone and a granite head stone. What differences are there between the two stones and why?
11. Name someone from the cemetery and what occupation they held.
12. Who was the youngest person who died and who was the oldest?



13. The average age of death in the cemetery is 27. Why is this average age so young?
14. Where is the cemetery located in relation to the village? Why was it put here?
15. Write down an epitaph. Make up one of your own.
16. Why are so many stones unreadable?
17. Why don't most of the modern stones have epitaphs?
18. What can you determine about the role of pioneer women just by looking at their gravestones?
19. Sketch a stone with a symbol on it that you like.
20. Now that you've had a chance to look around Hamer Cemetery, do you think cemeteries are scary, natural, historical, or (your own adjective)? Why do you feel this way?



# HAMER CEMETERY WORKSHEET

## ANSWER SHEET

This worksheet has been designed not only to get your students to explore the cemetery, but also to do some critical thinking. Not all the questions have one (or any) correct answer. Feel free to add or delete questions depending upon your emphasis in seeing the cemetery.

1. Whose stone in Hamer Cemetery is the tallest? Why?  
*Hugh Hamer, he was a State Senator, a wealthy businessman, and a very well respected man.*
2. Hamer Cemetery originated in 1832. Can you find any stones that are older than that here? What is the most recent date you can find?  
*There are stones that predate 1832. These stones were moved here from different areas because of family unity - keeping the family plot together. The most recent date on a carved stone is from May 1989 -Joseph Andrew Evans.*
3. List 4 different symbols you found and what you think they mean.  
*a. - d. Refer to page 4 for a list of symbols and their meanings.*
4. What is the difference between a head stone and a foot stone? Why don't all the graves have a foot stone?  
*A head stone marks the head of the grave and would normally be more elaborately carved than a foot stone. Foot stones could also have many carvings, but many only have initials or a name. Some graves don't have foot stones because only a head stone was carved (all that is necessary), or the stone has been broken or moved.*
5. Two different types of rock have been used to make the grave markers, granite and limestone. Which one is more recent and why has a change been made?  
*Granite. It is used today because it doesn't weather as much as limestone does.*
6. What common family names can you find in the cemetery?  
*Hamer, Turley, Lynn, (many other answers are possible)*
7. What does "In memory of..." mean?  
*This means that the person may not actually be buried there.*
8. What direction do the stones face?  
*East - the writing is on the west side.*
9. Which stone faces the wrong direction in Hamer Cemetery? Why?  
*Oliver and Vyletta A. Kelley (at the back of the Cemetery). The husband's name was carved on the wrong side of the stone and was not discovered until the wife died. Instead of carving a new stone, they simply turned it around.*



10. One woman has both a limestone and a granite head stone. What differences are there between the two stones and why?  
*She has the same basic inscription on both stones only the hand pointing up is the opposite hand. Possible reasons may include that the original stone was not found until after the new stone was made, an inexperienced carver made a mistake in the symbolism, ...*
11. Name someone from the cemetery and what occupation they held.  
*Various examples- from symbols or stones (soldier, senator, blacksmith)*
12. Who was the youngest person who died and who was the oldest?  
*Youngest - numerous answers due to infants dying the same day they were born.  
Oldest - Ephraim Hixon (1866-1960) age 94*
13. The average age of death in the cemetery is 27. Why is the average age so young?  
*People's lives then were much more difficult than now. Many children died at birth or in early childhood. Medical treatment was not as advanced as it is today. Infections and diseases were difficult to treat and cure.*
14. Where is the cemetery located in relation to the village? Why was it put here?  
*The Cemetery is located high point of a ridge above the village. This was not only to prevent flooding, but also to place the deceased loved ones closer to the Heavens.*
15. Write down an epitaph. Make up one of your own.
16. Why are so many stones unreadable?  
*Limestone deteriorates when exposed to weather. The unreadable stones are made of limestone. Some of the stones have also been broken or covered by soil which has made reading difficult at best.*
17. Why don't most of the modern stones have epitaphs?  
*Modern stones de-emphasize the person as an individual.*
18. What can you determine about the role of pioneer women just by looking at their gravestones?  
*The role of women was to be mother, wife and keep the home. From the size and amount of carving on most of the stones, we can see that the role of a woman did not command as much respect or attention as a man, particularly her husband.*
19. Sketch a stone with a symbol on it that you like.
20. Now that you've had a chance to look around Hamer Cemetery, do you think cemeteries are scary, natural, historical, or (your own adjective)? Why do you feel this way?



